



Monday, March 9, 2015
Government Administration and Elections Committee

Submitted by Peter Gostin, Registrar of Voters, City of New Britain

Oppose S.B. 1051 An Act Concerning Strengthening Connecticut's Elections

Senator Cassano, Representative Jutila, and Members of the GAE Committee,

My name is Peter Gostin, Registrar of Voters from New Britain and Vice-President of ROVAC.

I am testifying in opposition to SB 1051 which is seeking to replace the current elected system for Registrars of Voters with an appointed version via the legislative bodies and town clerks from each municipality. Although there are a number of reasons I disagree with this proposal, I will concentrate on two of them: Accountability and Minority Party Representation.

First, regarding accountability, the current system of electing registrars is superior to appointing one in that all current statutes place the burden of implementing the duties of the office squarely on the shoulders of both registrars. Should there be any dereliction of these duties the State Elections Enforcement Commission has the power to compel testimony and, upon appropriate finding, can actually levy fines against one or both registrars. Conversely, under the appointed system in this bill a single registrar would report to the town clerk, who, by virtue of being the department head, would appear to bear the ultimate burden of responsibility. Any discipline for failure to perform the duties of registrar would possibly remove the SEEC from having any authority to review and fine a registrar and place it under the domain of the town clerk. Or perhaps a fine and/or removal process would be written into a town's ordinance, as Section 2 of the proposed law seems to imply? Wouldn't it be odd that a non-elected municipal employee could have an ordinance written specifically for their job that no other non-elected municipal employee is subject to? On top of that, what would the rules of removal be should such registrar have joined a union, as many would necessarily have to do since they would have become town employees? The clearer lines of responsibility and accountability are already built into the current elected registrar process. The proposed bill would only end up muddying the waters for many, with payrolls, administrative and legal costs assuredly added to most, if not all, municipalities.

Secondly, as to minority party representation, under the proposed bill the current parity afforded to each of the major parties, as defined by statute, would be abolished and thus result in the dominate local party becoming the ONLY political party to have a set of eyes on the voter enrollment and exercising control over the election process. In most larger cities a Democrat would become registrar, and in many smaller-to-mid size towns a Republican would become registrar. Since its' inception the current system of electing two registrars from opposing political parties in Connecticut has provided a steady and reliable real time check and balance to conducting elections and administering the voter rolls. To do away with such a valuable system would place one or the other party at a disadvantage, not to mention stripping away the protection afforded to other minor parties and the public at-large when a second set of eyes is lost to overseeing the administration of elections. Our forefathers understood the value of having a minority voice preserved and seated at the table. In fact, our state too has long recognized the same value in the mandates contained in Section 9-167 of the Connecticut General Statutes, where the make-up of local legislative bodies, school boards, and commissions are required to adhere to a formula that guarantees a minor party presence. One party control is never a good idea, yet replacing and reducing our currently elected two registrar system with a single, appointed one would end up accomplishing something that belittles and contradicts the very obligation the state imposes on each municipality in CGS Section 9-167.

In summary, I respectfully urge the members of the GAE committee to reject SB 1051. Thank you for your time.

Peter Gostin

VP - ROVAC

Registrar - New Britain